

Hobbies

Some new insights on a few old coins

By Roger Boye

Here are the answers to questions about old or unusual coins.

Q—What does “VDB” mean in reference to Lincoln pennies? Are “VDB” coins special?

B.N., Highland Park

A—Those letters are the initials of sculptor and coin designer Victor D. Brenner, whose one-cent piece was first issued in 1909 on the 100th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth. “VDB” appears prominently on the “tails side” of some 1909-dated Lincolns, resulting in the notations “1909 VDB” or “1909-S VDB” in price guides (the “S” is for San Francisco).

Just 484,000 of the 1909-S VDB cents were made, lowest mintage in the Lincoln-cent se-

ries. By comparison, Uncle Sam produced about nine billion Lincolns last year.

Starting in 1918, the initials were placed on the “heads side,” near the rim at 7 o’clock, where they still are today. But you’ll probably need a magnifying glass to see them because of their tiny size.

Q—We own several coins marked “Helvetia.” Where are they from?

T.H., Chicago

A—Switzerland, which was called “Helvetia” in ancient times. The name still is used on modern-day Swiss coinage.

Q—My grandfather left us a gold-coin chain with four old \$5 gold pieces. All of the coins have holes drilled in them. Are they collectible?

E.R., Joliet

A—In general, gold coins with holes are worth their “metal value” only unless the date is quite rare. Each of your coins contains about a quarter-ounce of gold, and the chain also might have some value.



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